

THE AMERICAN
NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 3. VOL. XIV.)

MARCH, 1840.

(WHOLE No. 159.)

SERMON CCLXXVIII.

BY T. E. VERMILYE, D. D.

NEW-YORK.

DEATH BY SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.

"But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost."

2 CORINTHIANS, 4:3.

We can scarcely conceive of a more affecting commission or a more terrible doom than that which Isaiah was commanded to bear against rebellious Israel, when God was about to give them up to the blindness of their minds and the hardness of their hearts. "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert and be healed." With what feelings must the prophet have borne such a commission, which seemed to leave no avenue for mercy, which by its very terms cut off all hope from his people. They were to be fatally enshrouded in that darkness they had so long courted, and were given over to the delusions they had so fearfully indulged: they were to behold the scheme of salvation unfolded before them without apprehending its import: to see all their prophecies advance to fulfilment, their law completed in the great victim to which it pointed without recognizing the Messiah: they were to witness his miracles without yielding to the evidence, to listen to his doctrines without acknowledging the voice of God, to have the way of life set before them and refuse to walk therein: they were to hear the oracle of heaven pronounce their national destruction without trembling; in utter insensibility to see the sun of salvation decline and depart, to leave them in a night of hopeless desertion. And how exactly does their history coincide with these prophetic denunciations: not a link is wanting to complete the evidence of their guilt, and each event of Providence yields a tremendous attestation to the truth and justice of God. We witness their persevering rejection of the Messiah, and the imprecated curse still cleaves to the nation. We behold them insensible to the warning, and they become a scattered and peeled people. "Blindness

hath happened unto Israel unto this day:" to this day they remain a living and sad memorial of the guilt and danger of rejecting the truth, and of the righteousness of God, who taketh vengeance.

No other feelings than those of astonishment and sorrow can find a place in our minds, as we contemplate this mournful example. It seems strange, wonderful, that they should thus persist in their infatuation, amidst warnings and reproofs; and the holiness and justice of God is confessed by every tongue. And yet, have we ever reflected, that under the government of the same God the same principles must still exist: that with clearer light and more impressive sanctions, the guilt and danger of rejecting the claims of the Gospel cannot be less? Have we ever thought of the solemn inference, "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost?"

Let me ask your attention to the scope and meaning of this declaration and your personal concern with it. For the sake of connected illustration, we shall consider what is implied in the subject here spoken of, "*our Gospel*." Call your thoughts to the truth *that it may be hidden* from some; and notice *the consequences* to such; "*they are lost*." These topics should awaken a trembling solicitude in every bosom, not to be dispelled until the great question of our personal interest in the Gospel salvation is happily decided. Let us,

I. Inquire what is comprehended in the subject here spoken of, "*OUR GOSPEL*." The term, as you are well aware, signifies "*glad tidings*," and in its technical use the good news of salvation to a perishing world; the revelation of free pardon and the promise of eternal life to sons and daughters of apostacy and guilt. It finds its necessity in the fact of human depravity, and comprehends all those doctrines of grace and truth which flow from God, and through Jesus Christ result in the complete salvation of sinners. "Herein God may be just, and the justifier of him who believeth." "He hath made peace through the blood of the cross; by him to reconcile all things to himself, whether they be things in heaven or things on the earth." Most emphatically, therefore, may it be styled "*glad tidings of great joy to all people*." The very announcement should fill the soul with raptures of love, and prompt on earth the glad response to the exulting praise of angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men." From the tens of thousands who are most interested in this divine communication, from the myriads who can be saved only by its virtue, from the captives of sin and sorrow to whom it comes as a proclamation of liberty and joy, does it demand and deserve a ready acceptance, as a message well authenticated and worthy of the benevolence of God.

But without expatiating upon its general character, let us notice more particularly some of its leading features. Recognizing, then, the total alienation of the human family from its Sovereign, which implies not merely a *liability* to sin and disinclination to holiness, but actual transgression and virulent enmity of heart against God; from this point it proceeds to teach the necessity and the fact of propitiation for iniquity, and an available righteousness through the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. Let it be remembered that

the Gospel is prepared for *sinner*s : it is this fact which renders it so peculiarly interesting to us ; and in this view the whole revelation is to be regarded as a *remedial scheme*, a *restorative dispensation*, designed both to satisfy for transgression and also to renew us to a state of holy affections ; to bring us back in thought and spirit to God, as well as to provide an atonement to the broken law. The grand feature upon which the eye fastens is this ; and the mind seeks for the fulfilment of this purpose in the provision of Jesus the Mediator : this, in the expressive language of the apostle, comprises the "*great mystery of godliness*:" this originates our hopes and gives confidence to our faith, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses." Instead of directing the anxious mind to legal observances, by which to propitiate the divine favor, it inculcates repentance towards God, and directs it immediately by faith to Christ, "who took away sin, by the sacrifice of himself." And not more by explicit commands, than by exciting the heart to gratitude and love for such boundless favors, does it certainly lead to new obedience. Thus it divests the thought of death of its sting, the grave of its terrors, and eternity of its curse, and opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers. It renews the soul to love and duty ; it revives its dying hopes ; it relumines this world by the light of God's favor, and brings back primeval peace : it darts through the grave a ray that points to the kingdom of our Father : it sets over against the pains and woes of the present state an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. This is the Gospel, proffering blissful hopes while it exacts self-denying duties ; and rendering the favor and fruition of God certain by the righteousness of another in the absence of all righteousness of our own. And who—what needy sinner—will not hail it, will not submit to it, will not freely relinquish all other dependence, to live by its life-giving power ? What temporal boon from the hand of our God can be compared in our thoughts with this gift to the soul, "*eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*?"

But the apostle styles it "*our Gospel*." Not, however, with any feeling of pride and selfish appropriation, which the whole scope of the passage disproves, but in contradistinction to the schemes of philosophic teachers, and especially in distinction from the instrumentality employed under the old testament. It was committed to him and his fellow-laborers, to make it known among men ; and with respect to their ministry of the truth, there was one fact which set it above all other means of instruction, the Holy Spirit wrought with them in the dispensation committed to their hands, imparting strength to their own hearts and sealing the truth on the hearts of their hearers. Hence it is called *the ministration of the Spirit* ; more glorious than that of old, *the ministration of condemnation, written and engraven in stones* : for the latter was accompanied with the terrific displays of Sinai, and uttered the sentence of wrath, the former was ushered in with the mild accents of love, and made sinners alive unto God. But with respect to the benefits of the Gospel, they were not more *his* than *ours* ; not more intended for Paul and his asso-

ciates and the primitive disciples, than for you and me ; for sinners of every name and clime, wherever the word of this salvation is sent. It is as unrestricted as the rain from heaven, ample in its blessings as the necessities of man.

II. We call your attention to the intimation that this Gospel and all its benefits *MAY BE HID*, is hid from the minds of some. Would that observation did not so often seem to affirm the painful truth. The apostle makes mention of two veils which concealed from the minds of the Jews the true import of their law, and with these he contrasts the Gospel, in our text. The first veil rested on the *law* itself ; it arose from the obscurity of the types and figures of that economy which were the symbols of those spiritual things the Jews were not ready to apprehend. But the second veil was on *their hearts* ; it was that their perverse prejudices and corrupt affections blinded their minds to the purity of the truth and the import of those shadows of good things to come, of which the substance was Christ, and redemption through him. And the apostle would intimate, that if under the former dispensation there might have existed some excuse for the Jews, under the Gospel there could be none : there was no impenetrable veil resting on its pages : it was fully authenticated and plainly preached. Neither in the Gospel, nor yet in the method of its promulgation, was to be found the difficulty. Nothing but the *veil on their hearts* could shut out its light from any minds, and render them insensible to its claims. If any did not discern its truth, their own prejudices, their pride, their sinful lusts intervened to obscure its lustre and preclude them from its blessings. And where the same conduct is indulged among us, the same consequences must ensue.

Among the various classes who are thus blinded to the sacred oracles, there are indeed different modes by which the god of this world accomplishes his fatal purpose ; though all may be traced finally to the *depravity of the human heart*.

1. *The Gospel is hid to those who deny its divine origin*, and who, impelled by the pride or the lusts of the mind, embrace instead a cold and cheerless infidelity. I say through the *pride or lusts of the mind* ; for I find it impossible, after the most candid reflection on the subject, to convince myself that any other or better causes can exist as the foundation of a speculative or practical infidelity : and I never yet have read of or know the individual who could be fairly said to have come to this result from a frank and careful investigation of the subject. In the mass of unbelievers, objections and cavils are adopted, without any reasonable pretence that the evidence of the truth has been fairly examined : and in relation to such as have been truly enlightened and philosophic men, it seems not difficult, in all the instances I have known, to detect reasons of vanity, the pride of opinion, of singularity and independence of mind, or reasons of sensuality, the individual being the unhappy slave of passions and appetites which the Bible condemns, but which he could not or would not renounce. But the man who rejects revelation, the necessity or the possibility, to what monstrous conclusions

must he proceed : that the Deity who formed the spirit of man has no means of communicating with that spirit ; or that no facts have arisen, none can arise in the history of the race, to prompt or demand his intervention : for man, frail, erring and helpless, there is no heavenly light and no paternal providence : he is a worshiper in a vast temple, where no divinity hears his petitions or deigns to utter responses. The man who denies revelation must not only refuse credit to all the accumulated evidence of miracles and prophecy, but must close his eyes also upon all the pure precepts, the renovating influences, the hallowed effects of its morality upon the individual and upon the social state. To his perverted vision all its most beneficent results become confusion and evil ; and we can conceive the same man incapable of hearing the voice of Deity in the harmony of the spheres, blind to his glory in the noontide sun, unaffected by the loveliness of his works as he gazes on the star-spangled heavens in the midnight scene. As he becomes an *infidel* despite of the proofs of divine wisdom and goodness on the page of revelation, so may he become an *atheist* despite of the traces of an infinite, intelligent Creator on the page of nature. To such the Gospel is hid.

AGAIN. 2. *It is hid to those who make no personal application of its doctrines, and in whom it exerts no experimental power.* There is a large class of persons who professedly accredit its divinity, and in words acknowledge the truth and even the importance of its doctrines, whose belief and concern seem there to end. They have no conception of its spiritual design, nor do they seek to attain it ; no conviction of the need of its experimental power, nor do they submit themselves to it. All is theory and speculation in their minds, and there it terminates ; for as to personal, practical religion, a personal acceptance of Christ by faith, a personal renovation of the heart, they do not seek it, perhaps do not believe in it. Now in receiving these important truths, in exercising an evangelical *faith* upon them, we are required not merely to apprehend them by the understanding, nor to extend to them a speculative assent only, as in themselves true ; but they must come with a controlling power to our consciences, must be felt as true with regard to us, and must be allowed to sway the whole soul. It is not simply that Jesus Christ came as a sacrifice and offering to make reconciliation by his death, that will save the soul : this mere fact unfelt, unappropriated, cannot impart one ray of comfort or the least hope of salvation. And they miserably deceive themselves and mistake the Gospel, who expect to meet the approbation of the final Judge by this cold acknowledgment of a Redeemer whom they have never cordially embraced, or by assenting to the shedding of that blood which they have never applied. The mind must not only comprehend the terms of salvation, but the heart must embrace them as the support of all its hopes, the consolation of every sorrow, the source of every joy : this it is to believe the Gospel, and nothing short of it deserves the name. Compare, then, the large portion of Gospel hearers with this standard, and how lamentably, even by

their own professions, do they fall short.—ONE professes to believe that a *good moral life*, a decent attention to the relative duties of his station, or perhaps doing *no harm to any*, is enough. On such ground he rests his hopes : and this, too, while in a land of Gospel illumination, and professing to think highly of its benefits. But for him what need was there that Jesus Christ should make an atonement ; what need has he of the Gospel at all ; his virtues might exist, such virtues doubtless did exist in the pagan world, where the word of salvation had never come. He has no obligations to the Bible and the Saviour it reveals.—ANOTHER, without venturing the infidel's creed, yet feels a repugnance to what is termed the *strictness* of the Gospel, and makes this an excuse for not complying with its practical demands. And ordinarily, the very point where the Gospel meets with opposition at the hands of such, is that where it claims self-denial, a submission of our pride, our passions, our souls to the authority of God, and a full dedication of our persons to his glory. They cavil at particular truths, they do not perceive the necessity of such self-renunciation, the reasonableness of such requirements. They will admit their sinfulness, but not their *total* unworthiness ; the benefits of redemption, but will not rely wholly on it ; the necessity of divine favor, but will not seek it with their whole hearts. And what evidence need we more conclusive than this ; what can yield a more tremendous attestation to the truth, "*the carnal mind is enmity against God.*"—With ANOTHER again, making, perhaps, high pretensions to reverence for religion, it becomes a matter of mere sentimentalism, and the preaching of the Gospel a mere gratification of the taste, while the heart is still unrenewed and Christ is rejected. Of intellectual hearers there are not a few such. They are pleased with the Gospel as a whole ; admire its sublime truths and its general influence upon the face of society : they can perceive and acknowledge this. But when it is addressed to themselves, and urged upon their acceptance as a matter of paramount importance, they are hardly satisfied, and much less do they obey. "Lo! Son of Man, thou art unto them as a lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument." They applaud the Gospel as an interesting topic for the imagination ; they sit, breathless with admiration, while death, judgment, eternity, heaven and hell are the themes. We may take down the pillars of the universe in their view, and introduce the last great day with all its pomp, and if this be gracefully done they will admire the power and effect. Meanwhile they have no thought of their own concern with those scenes, and the veil rests on their hearts. To all such the Gospel is hid ; and, though preached with the eloquence of an angel, while they thus receive it, it can confer upon them no real blessings. Until it awakens the conscience, pervades the soul, renews the affections, extends its influence through every relation and to every act of life, until it sanctifies the heart and leads to new obedience, it has not wrought its own true effects on us ; and whatever outward respect we may pay its form and demands, if we rest in this we have only the semblance and deny the power. But if,

with full conviction of our consciences that it is designed to be felt and practised, we yet close every avenue to the heart, and live as do they who confess no such conviction, how dreadfully and fatally are we deluding our souls.

III. NOTICE THE CONSEQUENCE. "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." "Who destroy themselves," as the original is rendered literally, by which their own agency is denoted. The apostle, by this emphatic expression, evidently intends to refer to the final award which they will meet in the presence of the Judge. Then "the wicked shall be driven away in his wickedness." All they who may at present fall under some one of the classes I have described, may not be included in this catastrophe, for the Holy Spirit may awaken their consciences, repentance may intervene, an Almighty arm may "pluck them as brands from the burning." Yet while they live on in impenitence, and the Gospel remains hidden, they are in a lost condition; lost and insensible to all the great and valuable ends of their being, to the pure and renovating influence of the truth, to the favor of God and the comforts of his grace; *lost* as a part of the world of sinners, for whom Christ died, failing in the blessings he now confers and the hopes he here inspires. At present, in this world, they are under the frown of heaven. Nor is this all.—And here we would gladly pause and draw a curtain over that scene which lies before them, and which we cannot pretend to describe. For who can tell, what language can portray the future condition through which such a soul is destined to pass; or who can conceive the emphasis of wo denoted by that word "*lost*," when it refers to the perdition the Almighty inflicts, the immortal spirit endures, and of which eternity is the duration? It is abandonment, without relief, in the hour of death to all the remorse of recollection and the horrors of anticipation: the hearing, the enduring, at the judgment, of that awful sentence, "*Depart, ye cursed:*" the passing away from the face of the Judge, from the sight of heaven, from all companionship with what is pure, and lovely, and blissful, to an inhabitation with damned spirits, "*where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched:*" the giving up of all hope, the yielding to deep and endless despair. Oh! with what habiliments of sorrow shall we clothe the universe, "with what wail of wo shall we pierce the heavens, what tears shall we shed that shall fitly mourn a *lost soul*"—a spirit on which has lighted the wrath of God for ever and ever? "*If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*"

1. We are taught by this subject the entire sufficiency of the Gospel and its ministration for all the purposes of instruction, conviction, and conversion. Such is very clearly the thought in the mind of the apostle, and the point of the text; for the benevolence of Deity has provided this scheme, and if it fail, *men are lost*. It imparts all the information we require respecting the Divine will, and our duty; respecting the fact and the method of propitiation with God, respecting the life that now is, and that which is to come. It affords *motives to activity*, drawn from the

solemn annunciations respecting the present world, and the anticipations of the future. Earth, heaven, and hell unite to impress its calls, and fill the soul with solicitude, and excite its energies. It abounds with *means* fitted and available—the foolishness of preaching—a means, to the wise of this world foolishness, but to all sober estimation, the wisdom of God—he hath appointed, to keep alive the sense of his truth, and save them that believe. And the whole plan of grace stands forth as the result of infinite wisdom, goodness, and truth. Well may He demand “What more could I do that I have not done?” Truly may he declare, “*if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*” Wisely and justly are we shut up unto the faith of the Gospel.

2. We learn the consequences that must necessarily ensue upon our neglect or rejection of the Gospel. It is left with you, as moral and accountable agents, to embrace or refuse it. Means and motives, light and authority are employed; and if all these fail, “if our Gospel is still hid, they to whom it is hid *are lost.*” How solemn, how soul-subduing the thought to him who, in the name of Jesus, proclaims, as well as to those who hear it. The object of the ministry is to arouse men from that stupor in which they neither see nor feel the power of eternal realities: to pass the magic circle of worldliness in which they entrench themselves, to lay open the folds of delusion, to start them from their insensibility, and make them know the hand of doom is on them. The minister may be found faithful to his trust, doing his work with singleness of heart; but he sees little fruit. Against the truth men are armed; to its invitations they are callous; under its convictions they nerve themselves to resistance. And what, then, is his hope or reward? He shall indeed save his own soul, and receive the crown of righteousness that fadeth not away. But as it respects those who hear, and are not saved, what is his consolation? Oh, how bitter the reply! The dreadful truth flashes on his mind, and seems to *sound the knell of souls.* “If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” And are any of you, hearers, preparing for this destiny? Are any of you making light of this mercy? Are any of you among those from whom a despised and hidden Gospel will exact so fearful a retribution? I tremble while I propound the question! Well may you tremble, if conscience charge home this guilt. For then, if you will persevere, I follow on to your dying pillow; and it is irradiated by no light, no heaven-born consolation: I think of the last groan of despair; of a judgment of condemnation, and an eternity of sorrow. Yet let me still persuade you to be reconciled unto God. Of one thing you may be certain. While the Gospel is plain and distinct in its declarations of your guilt, it is also full and free in its proffers of pardon. Whilst with most tremendous energy it enforces the necessity of reconciliation with God, it opens the avenue for your entrance. There are no barriers erected but what your own hands have raised. There is no obstruction but

what your own hearts cast in the way. You have been fearfully assiduous in the work of self-destruction ; with appalling activity have reared the pile for the last conflagration. God grant you may not be consumed thereby. Destruction, eternal death is before you ; but, in return, there is safety. You are at this moment welcome to the pardon of sin, through the righteousness of Christ. You are welcome to his name in your petitions, and to his intercessions in heaven ! You are welcome to the Spirit's influence in the work of sanctification : you are welcome to all the promises of the Gospel, the prospects of blessedness, the crown of life that fadeth not away.

SERMON CCLXXIX.

BY T. E. VERMILYE, D. D.

THE GREAT QUESTION ANSWERED.

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"—Acts, 16 : 30.

The conversion of the Philippian jailer, as narrated in this chapter, is one of the most striking and interesting instances on record of the power of divine grace, and of the sovereignty of God in the distribution of his favors. In the most unpromising circumstances, from the most unlikely characters, he calls, subdues, converts, whom he will ; and, on the other hand, whom he will he hardens. As in the case of the apostle Paul and others, this conversion also was effected by direct miraculous agency ; and it cannot therefore be regarded as an instance applicable to ordinary circumstances, except so far as the operations of the mind of the jailer and his convictions of truth and duty were similar to what must always exist where there is true conversion. God, in the economy of his grace, has not restricted himself to any particular class of characters or circumstances ; yet the truth to the knowledge and love of which we are renewed is one, and the graces inwrought by the Holy Ghost are in all instances the same. Our text is the deeply solemn inquiry which the jailer uttered in the moment when his attention had been effectually arrested, and his soul had been alarmed, agonized, by the convictions of his guilt before God. Knowing what he did of the character and doctrines of the imprisoned apostles, it seems more natural to suppose that he had become impressed and alarmed for his eternal salvation, by the miracle he witnessed, which attested the agency of the mighty

God, than that his inquiry was prompted merely by fear of the punishment to be inflicted should he allow his prisoners to escape. The question, however, was not more important to him than to us; it respects our eternal welfare as well as his, and involves consequences of endless joy or sorrow. Oh! that we might hear from every soul, from every impenitent sinner yet in a world of hope, the earnest inquiry, "what must I do to be saved?" If, then, you are disposed to reflect on the things of salvation, let me ask your serious attention, while I endeavor in a very plain way to show WHAT YOU ARE NOT TO DO, and IN THE NEXT PLACE WHAT YOU MUST DO, if you would secure eternal life.

1. If you would be saved, you must *not dismiss the subject from your mind*, and entirely disregard preparation, as does the infidel, and as do multitudes of the worldly, careless hearers of the Gospel. The infidel in theory, and the latter class practically, argue that there is no danger whatever that a merciful God will not save all his creatures, and that it is therefore the most preposterous thing in the world to give ourselves trouble and uneasiness in relation to this matter: we are in no danger: all will go well; we need be under no apprehension of the future, for, from a benevolent Deity we shall certainly receive what we desire—endless happiness. Hence the notions we hear advanced, that repentance, faith in Christ, heaven, hell, are all priestcraft and delusion; and all deep anxiety for the soul's salvation is fanaticism and weakness. Thus the champions of infidelity, by ridicule and a sneer, rather than argument, strengthen their unbelief, and by plausible pretences entice the young and unwary. But whence do they derive their doctrines, except from the desires and wishes of their own perverted hearts, and in direct opposition to a clearly established revelation? And whether it be wise to trust this foundation of sand, judge ye.

The careless neglecters of religion practically adopt the same conclusions. As if life and salvation were not deserving of search, they live securely in the delusion that *all is well*, when God has solemnly declared, "It shall not be well with the wicked." To obtain salvation, it is no way to dismiss the subject from our concern, as if it neither demands nor deserves attention, and cry a delusive and soothing peace; for then "sudden destruction cometh, and they shall not escape."

2. It is no way to be saved, to silence our consciences, and soothe our souls in the deceitful opinion that *ALL are hereafter to be saved*, and therefore we need give ourselves no particular anxiety in regard to the matter. If there were to be an universal salvation of the righteous and the wicked indiscriminately, then, where is the holiness of God? What becomes of his character as a *lover of righteousness and a hater of iniquity*, which he is declared to be? What becomes of his declarations that at the last day it shall be said, "he that is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is

holy, let him be holy still?" What becomes of such declarations as these, of certain characters; "they shall *not* see life, but the wrath of God *abideth* on them?" If the doctrine of universalism be true, this declaration must be false. Of Judas it was said, "*good* were it for that man if he had never been born;" which is untrue either if he were annihilated, or if he shall at last be saved; because, at whatever period his salvation may arrive, it will be thenceforth eternal, and so positive a blessing, that it were not good if he had not been born to enjoy it. From these few texts of Scripture it is evidently no very direct way to be saved to rely on universalism, and expect that we shall come in with the mass.

But again; on this scheme there is no necessity indeed, for all the prayer, and zeal, and fear, and effort with which the Scriptures exhort us to work out our salvation. If not quite so easily, yet we shall as certainly be saved without repentance, faith, and the holy obedience of the Gospel; and it is therefore very absurd in the inspired writers to insist so very largely and constantly as they do, on the absolute necessity of these things. But while they do thus insist, it is no way to be saved to trust in this doctrine, for we have all the probabilities opposed to us. A man may possibly go over the falls of the mighty Niagara with life; would you therefore try it? But if this notion be correct, when the jailer in an agony of spirit asked "What must I do to be saved?" why did not the apostle at once calm all his fears, by simply telling him all should be saved, and therefore he was in no danger? No! this is a way to sear the conscience in sin, but not to obtain salvation.

3. It is no way to be saved to trust in *our own merits before God*. The Scriptures uniformly denounce such a reliance as that which must prove vain at last. God has expressly declared, that "by the deeds of the law (that is, by human merit) no flesh should glory in his presence." The whole Bible, from beginning to end, is levelled directly against such a scheme, and is obviously intended to abase the pride of the human heart from which it springs. "All flesh has corrupted its way before God:" "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God:" "there is none righteous, no, not one." In these very clear and unequivocal terms does the word of God denounce such a ground of dependance, and set itself directly in opposition to it. Both in its general design, and by many plain expressions, it teaches, that in ourselves we can have nothing whereof to glory before God; and it must therefore be evident that if we build our hopes for eternity on such a foundation, we shall build on the sand. We rely on something different and apart from what God has established; and if God's method be the true and only way, our hopes will sink with us to perdition. Hence we conclude, that whoever has not yet been brought to the humbling conviction of his own entire unworthiness, that he is poor and miserable, and in want of all things, is still far off from the way of salvation

And yet there is no feeling more dear to us, no delusion more common and more cherished than this, of our own merit. It insinuates itself through all we think, and say, and do, in connection with religion, and is the leaven of hypocrisy, for ever at work, until a sovereign Spirit subdue the soul. Under the dictate of this feeling, we therefore find many theological systems greedily adopted, from which the doctrine of man's depravity, the cornerstone of the Gospel system, and the doctrine of the necessity of spiritual regeneration are excluded, and human goodness is substituted. Men are led to think well of themselves, so long as they are guilty of no gross acts which will shame them before their fellow-men. A good disposition, a fair character, and a decent attention to religious observances is their creed; and they are led to believe that if, in this way, they only do as well as they can, a merciful God will approve and accept them. But, by the side of this scheme, place the declaration which comprises the spirit of the Gospel, that *no flesh shall glory before God*, and is there not a most marked contrast? Every feeling of pride, however, either of our good dispositions or performances, partakes in its measure of this principle, and, as far as it is allowed, is a virtual rejection of the Saviour in his atoning character. He who is not humbled before God as a sinner—who has not felt and does not feel his desert of eternal condemnation, is not in the way to be saved; he to this hour needs the grand element of true repentance, the first principle of the oracles of God.

4. It is no way to be saved to depend *partly on our own righteousness, and partly on the merits of Christ*. This is a way in which various religionists strive to accommodate matters, by dividing the glory of salvation between the merit of Christ and the merits of the sinner. That man is under the influence of this delusion, who imagines that he must work until he possesses a certain amount of goodness to entitle him to trust in Christ. Hence we often hear the expression, "I do not think I am yet good enough to become a disciple of Christ," which involves a total misconception of the Gospel method of salvation. He is under this delusion, who supposes he is indebted to Christ for taking away the guilt of original sin, and that now he is to merit his salvation by his own good acts. He is under this delusion, who, with an avowed trust in Christ, is attempting to blend mortifications of the flesh, if he do this as a righteousness before God. All are under this delusion, who are not brought as hell-deserving sinners, having nothing to plead, simply to cast themselves over on Christ as the only ground of pardon. Men who are instructed in the Gospel, and speculatively receive its system, do not often formally exclude Christ entirely from their scheme of belief; yet is there constant danger where the pride of the heart has not been effectually mortified, that, in the conflict between their better knowledge and unsubdued hearts, they will attempt this union of what is irreconcilable; but it is no way to be saved to rely on ourselves in any measure.

5. It is no way to be saved to *procrastinate*. Many beside the miserable Felix, when conscience has been aroused, have said, "Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." And, like him, they have never found that season; their opportunities have never been renewed; it has never afterwards been convenient for them to repent and believe in Christ; the abused, dismissed Spirit has never returned. In a mortal malady, whatever we would do effectually, we must do immediately. In the salvation of the soul, so infinitely above any temporal good, what we would do must be done with all our might; for the opportunity may soon be gone, and that for ever. To defer it, then, until we have performed this or that business, until we have completed this or that plan, until we have accumulated a sufficient share of the world, until we shall have arrived at a certain age, is virtually to defer it for ever. When God calls, or when the Gospel offer is made to us, to procrastinate is no way to be saved: it is, in all human probability, to lose our convictions, and to destroy our souls. Had the jailer thus acted, it is more than probable we never should have heard of his conversion.

These are some of the delusions which men are apt to indulge on the subject of their salvation: they are some of the many false ways by which they hope to attain eternal life without a compliance with God's method of pardon. But in none of them, while God's word is true, can we be saved.

II. Let me point out the *Gospel method*. "*What must I do to be saved?*" The reply of the apostle recognises an immediate obligation to an immediate and indispensable duty—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." And this is the uniform language of Scripture. "*Repent* and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost." "*Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.*" "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.*" "*Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*" "*Whosoever believeth shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.*" In these brief expressions, the way of salvation is clearly, although comprehensively set forth; and by collating such passages, no sincere inquirer can be at a loss to determine what the Gospel prescribes, and what the Lord requires of him in the great matter of eternal life. It is to be observed, that where a single term is employed in any passage to denote the requisite change, such as *faith*, or *repentance*, or *love*, or *holiness*, it is very evidently intended to comprise all the rest; else neither the writers of the New Testament would harmonize, nor would the same writer be consistent with himself. The great Gospel demand summarily set forth is, "*repent and believe the Gospel.*"

1. This implies a *sincere contrition for sin, and a hatred of it*. "*Sin is that abominable thing which God hates;*" and we must

hate it and forsake it also, if we would hope to dwell where God is. And in this demand all sin, of whatever kind or degree, is included—the sins of the heart, vile affections, worldly love, which interferes with a supreme devotion to God, not less than outward acts of transgression. He takes a very superficial and inadequate view of this subject, and is never likely to know himself, or truly to *repent*, who flatters himself that because he is free from all outward acts of grossness, and possesses a good standing among men, therefore he must be approved by God. All this is but cleansing the outside of the cup and platter, while within it is full of all uncleanness: and we are expressly told that that which is highly esteemed among men, may often be, nay, is, abomination in the sight of God. In order truly to repent of sin, we must not close our eyes against the number or real character of our transgressions, but must be willing to view them as God views them—hateful, abominable, as without palliation or excuse.

2. The Gospel demand *implies an immediate and unreserved submission to the authority of an holy God*. God does not condescend to excuse himself in any of his dealings to his creatures; certainly not to rebels. He demands unqualified submission to his government, and confession of the rectitude of all his ways, before he can accept sinners. He has done nothing, he can do nothing, but what is in itself perfectly righteous, and in conformity with his own holy nature. This sinners do not feel, and will not acknowledge really, although God's holiness especially appears in condemning sin, and punishing sinners. Here God and a rebellious world are at issue; and here God can never so far deny himself, as to yield the point of controversy to the sinner. We must then submit to him unreservedly, and without attempting to make terms different from those he has prescribed. We must adore his holiness; confess that his laws, his government, his ways are right;—that if he should condemn us and cast us off, he would only do what we have deserved, and that we should have no right to complain. We must cast ourselves into his hands without limitation, and feel that if he consign us to hell, he is but just, and we are justly condemned. The feeling of soul it becomes us to cherish is this: "*thou art righteous, O Lord, when thou judgest and condemnest.*" And until we have such exercises, and see and adore a sovereign God in his holy ways, we are not in the way to be saved. God exacts this, and consistently, how can he demand less?

3. The Gospel demand *implies simple and entire reliance on Christ alone, as the Mediator*; by whose merit exclusively we are to be saved, if saved at all. This is the glory of the Gospel, and the bright and cheering hope of a ruined world: "Him hath God set forth to be the propitiation for our sin, to declare his righteousness, that God may be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth." Yet, since the whole plan is of God's devising—is applied by his free Spirit, and is throughout of grace, we

are to feel that God may withhold the blessing of faith and hope, if he please, and no injustice will be done to us, since it is only what we deserve. We come then before him as sinners deserving eternal condemnation—justifying him in what he has said, and in what he has determined to do; confessing the righteousness of his dealings, and submitting our souls to his disposal. But here is a way of mercy, and this he invites us to trust. Our reliance on the merits of Christ, he has promised, shall never put us to shame; and his simple, but glorious promise, we are to receive as the warrant of faith. This is to believe in Christ; it involves a recognition of God's sovereignty, righteousness, and grace—an entire renunciation of all our self-righteousness, and a consignment of the soul's best interests to the Saviour of sinners. "He who thus believes, shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."

4. The Gospel direction implies, rather asserts and insists upon, the necessity of a *life of active, holy obedience*. This it represents as the natural and necessary consequence of that repentance, faith, and holy love which it prescribes: and so intimately are they connected, that we are assured they cannot subsist apart; for "faith without works is dead, being alone." To learn the value which the inspired writers place upon a life of obedient holiness, in opposition to antinomian impiety, we have only to observe how uniformly and strenuously they insist upon it in all their writings; so that wherever else it may be imagined we obtain a release from the law as a rule of holy living, and immunity in sin as the privilege of faith, it is obvious we do not derive it from this source. Our obedience must be constant, extending to small as well as great concerns; to the exercises of the soul equally with external acts; for the law is spiritual, and our effort and desire must be to be perfectly holy, even as our Father, who is in heaven, is holy. He who allows himself in the indulgence of known sin, who does not strive and pray against it, and mourn under sin whenever it rises, gives evidence of the want of a holy state of heart. He is yet destitute of right apprehensions of a sanctified conscience. The Gospel thus points out to us the way of life, in terms not to be misapprehended by any who are at the pains to search with prayerful diligence. And he who is unwilling to pursue this high way, or from carelessness and a disregard of the lively oracles, falls into misapprehension, or fatal error, has none to accuse but himself. Repentance for sin, unqualified submission to God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, holy obedience, are the requisites to eternal life. He who attempts to climb up some other way, can be regarded in no other light than as a proud rejecter of the Gospel. Of all these affections and duties, *holy love* is the great actuating principle: without it, they cannot be performed in a manner acceptable to God. They all imply this affection as the source from which they must arise. "Love," it is said, "is the fulfilling of the law."

Having thus attempted in a direct way to explain what is *not*, and what *is* required of us, in order to our salvation, I proceed to offer one or two remarks.

We learn from this subject, *first*, that we have something, yea, much *to do* in this great concern. There is an idea prevalent to some extent, arising, I apprehend, from misconception often, rather than design, that we have nothing to do, can do nothing, in order to be saved. From erroneous notions of faith and grace, men suppose they must *wait* for some miraculous agency, and that without it, this whole matter is placed entirely beyond their reach. They must *wait* for, rather than *seek* the Spirit. The obvious effect of such a notion is, to render men easy in a state of impenitence—a state of mind at entire variance from the whole teaching of the word of God, which is enough to prove the entire fallacy of such an opinion.

Yet I remark in the *second* place, to obviate a contrary error, that what we have to do is something very different from what multitudes are doing, who hope by their deserts to obtain salvation. It is totally different from clothing ourselves in the garments of self-righteousness, or trusting to an amiable disposition, a moral life, or any degree of outward religious observances. A man may be exact in all these, even to a degree of self-mortification, and yet publicans and harlots may enter the kingdom of heaven before him. These very things may be perverted to such an use as to become the great difficulties in the way of his repentance and faith. What you have to do, is without delay, without excuse, without pleading any difficulties you may imagine to lie in your way to the performance of the duty God enjoins, without attempting to compromise with conscience or with God, to *repent* and *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you reply you cannot? but God commands it. Do you say there are difficulties in your way; you cannot yourself repent; you cannot convert your own heart? And do you ask how you are to proceed in order to remove these impediments? I answer, by *repenting* and *believing* the Gospel. God, who imposes this command, knows just where the difficulty lies; he knows the whole case; and, in the view of it all, he has shut you up to this single and immediate act; has authoritatively commanded you to *repent* and *believe*. He enjoins it with awful solemnity; suspends upon it your eternal hope, and requires it at once. Oh! do not begin to question his right, to invent apologies, to excuse your sin. “Bow, and make submission to your Judge.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”